NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER 1-0551 APRIL 9, 1976
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CZECHOSLOVAK CONGRESS PREVIEW

ANNCR:

ON MONDAY (4-12) CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S COMMUNIST PARTY BEGINS ITS FIFTEENTH CONGRESS IN PRAGUE AMID SIGNS OF GROWING PRESSURE ON THE COUNTRY'S DISSIDENTS. VOA CORRESPONDENT LARRY FREUND SENDS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

VOICE:

THE PARTY CONGRESS IS EXPECTED TO BE A PUBLIC CELEBRATION OF WHAT CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S LEADERSHIP SEES AS ITS SUCCESSES -- IN POLITICS, IDEOLOGY AND ECONOMICS. FEW IF ANY MAJOR CHANGES ARE LIKELY TO BE ANNOUNCED IN THE PARTY HIERARCHY, LED BY PRESIDENT GUSTAV HUSAK WHO TOOK OVER THE PARTY LEADERSHIP IN 1968 AFTER SOVIET TROOPS CRUSHED THE PRAGUE SPRING OF FORMER PARTY LEADER ALEXANDER DUBCEK.

OBSERVERS WILL BE FOLLOWING THE CONGRESS SPEECHES FOR ANY SIGNS OF NEW DIRECTIONS BY THE CZECHOSLOVAK PARTY -- PARTICULARLY IN ITS APPROACH TO MISTER DUBCECK AND OTHER FORMER PARTY MEMBERS UNDER THE SAME CLOUD. IN PAST MONTHS, PROTESTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE GROUP HAVE DRAWN SHARP FIRE FROM DOCTOR HUSAK AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP, NOTABLY VASIL BILAK, WIDELY REGARDED AS A HARDLINER. DOCTOR HUSAK WARNED EARLIER THIS YEAR THAT INDIVIDUALS OR SMALL GROUPS SHOULD CONSIDER THEIR POSITIONS REGARDING CZECHOSLOVAK LAWS AND THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATING THE LAWS. UNTIL NOW THE ARCHITECTS OF WHAT WAS ONCE DESCRIBED AS COMMUNISM WITH A HUMAN FACE HAVE BEEN CONSIGNED TO OFFICIAL OBVLIVION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, WITHOUT THE SHOW TRIALS, PRISON TERMS AND

DEATHS THAT FOLLOWED SIMILAR IMPOSITIONS OF ORTHODOXY IN OTHER EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. BUT THERE IS MOUNTING CONCERN AMONG DISSIDENTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN THE FACE OF HARSH PRESS ATTACKS AGAINST WHAT PARTY IDEOLOGICAL CHIEF BILAK DESCRIBES AS RIGHTWING OPPORTUNISTS. THERE IS ALSO CONCERN ABOUT THE RECENT ARREST OF ABOUT TWENTY PEOPLE OFFICIALLY DESCRIBED AS DRUG ADDICTS OR ALCOHOLICS, BUT SEEN BY WESTERN OBSERVERS AS MUSICIANS AND ARTISTS WHO HAVE REFUSED TO FOLLOW THE COUNTRY'S ORTHODOX CULTURAL POLICIES.

THERE HAVE ALREADY BEEN CLEAR SIGNS THAT THE CZECHOSLOVAK PARTY CONGRESS WILL ALSO HEAR FORCEFUL SPEECHES SUPPORTING LOYALTY TO THE SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY AND ATTACKING ANY DEVIATION FROM THAT ORTHODOXY, PARTICULARLY BY THE INCREASINGLY INDEPENDENT WESTERN COMMUNIST PARTIES. THE CZECHOSLOVAK PARTY NEWSPAPER RUDE PRAVO AND MISTER BILAK BOTH HAVE STRESSED THAT LOYALTY TO THE SOVIET UNION IS THE MAIN CRITERION OF PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM.

ECONOMICS IS ALSO EXPECTED TO FIGURE PROMINENTLY IN THE PARTY CONGRESS, AS THE LEADERSHIP MARKS WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN CALLED A SUCCESSFUL FIVE YEAR PLAN. OVER THE YEARS, LIVING STANDARDS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA HAVE IMPROVED AND CONSUMERS HAVE BEEN GIVEN A WIDER CHOICE OF THINGS TO BUY. MORE RECENTLY CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S TRADE POSITION HAS SUFFERED, A GAP OPENED FURTHER BY THE INCREASING COST OF ENERGY FROM BOTH THE WEST AND THE SOVIET UNION. SPEAKERS AT PRE-CONGRESS MEETINGS HAVE EMPHASIZED THE NEED TO REDUCE PRODUCTION COSTS AND INCREASE EFFICIENCY.

GH/CAK